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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000081

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FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: [KPAL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CASC](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [EG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: GAZA ROUND-UP: JANUARY 15

REF: A. CAIRO 0068
[1](#)B. CAIRO 0063
[1](#)C. CAIRO 0026
[1](#)D. CAIRO 0017
[1](#)E. CAIRO 0007
[1](#)F. CAIRO 0003
[1](#)G. CAIRO 0002

CAIRO 00000081 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Minister Counselor William R. Stewart
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Gilad visits; leaves disappointed. Demonstrations in support of Gaza continue throughout Egypt. Public opinion is strongly pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli; Israeli pilgrims are barred from a holy site. Embassy consular officers prepare for a potential evacuation of American citizens and possibly other nationalities via the Rafah border crossing. USAID procures medical supplies for distribution in Gaza. An Iranian ship allegedly carrying humanitarian supplies for Gaza was denied entry to an Egyptian port. End summary.

Rafah

[1](#)2. (S) Egyptian Ministry of Defense sources report Israeli air attacks continued along the Egypt/Gaza borderline. There were no munitions or collateral damage reported to have struck Egypt.

Diplomacy

[1](#)3. (C) Israeli envoy Amos Gilad met with EGIS chief Omar Soliman in Cairo January 15. According to diplomatic sources, the Hamas comments relayed by Soliman were "not what he'd (Gilad) wanted to hear." No time was announced for a return visit. Embassy will seek a more detailed read out.

[1](#)4. (C) Arab League summit: MFA Cabinet Advisor Mahmoud Afifi told us January 14 that the Qatari initiative for a Doha summit had failed, with the Qataris only obtaining the support of 14 member states (one short of the required two-thirds quorum). Afifi explained that the Egyptians (along with the Saudis) had called for a discussion of Gaza at the "consultative summit" in Kuwait for Economic and Social Development, as opposed to a separate extraordinary summit, as had been called for by Qatar. For an "extraordinary summit," the decision making includes the AL

SYG and host, as well as the current Arab League Presidency (Syria). According to Afifi, the decision making process for a "consultative summit," includes the Arab League Secretary General (Amre Moussa) and the host country (in this case Kuwait). This procedural difference would have allowed for Qatar to invite Hamas (and potentially non-Arab states) to the Doha summit, according to Afifi, something the Egyptians adamantly oppose. (Note: Arab League rules and procedures are often mystifying; a review of the Arab League charter support Afifi's argument, but also appears open to other interpretations. End note.)

15. (C) Gaza-based Hamas representatives held a press conference January 14 in Cairo, at which they appeared to agree in principle to the Egyptian terms for a cease-fire, but also that Hamas had issues with some aspects of Egypt's plan. The Hamas representatives also stressed that Hamas has no grievance with Egypt, or its efforts to facilitate a resolution of the crisis.

Demonstrations

16. (U) Police prevented protestors from demonstrating in front of the Embassy at 1300 local time on January 15. Calls for the protest originated on a Facebook site, and the leader of the Islamist opposition Labor Party announced he would participate. We estimate that the police presence in the area of the demonstration was over one thousand personnel, and police stymied protestors, efforts to arrive at the site. Only about five people, possibly including the Labor Party leader, managed to reach the demonstration site 50 yards north of the Embassy, and police quickly detained them.

CAIRO 00000081 002.2 OF 003

17. (U) The independent press reported that 1,000 protestors from various political groups took part in a conference January 14 in the Nile Delta town of Behira to support Gazans, and that 3,000 mostly Muslim Brotherhood (MB)-affiliated protesters demonstrated January 14 in the coastal town of Port Said. The MB claimed that 3,000 of its members demonstrated January 14 in the Delta town of Damanhour, 1,000 lawyers from various opposition backgrounds demonstrated January 14 in the Delta town of Kafr El-Sheikh, and 2,000 women demonstrated at the doctors' syndicate in the Delta town of Damietta.

18. (C) A human rights NGO contact told us January 15 he believes that although the Egyptian public is angry and frustrated with the continuing Israeli operations in Gaza, he has observed a growing trend of ordinary Egyptians supporting the GOE's policies of publicly criticizing Hamas, pursuing diplomatic steps toward a cease-fire and protecting Egyptian sovereignty. He commented that the GOE is trying to disrupt the political opposition's attempts to organize demonstrations by arresting opposition members. According to press reports quoting MB Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef, 860 MB members have been arrested since December 27, in connection to Gaza-related demonstrations.

Public Opinion

19. (SBU) On January 14, dueling Gaza-related press conferences were held at parliament, by the ruling party and opposition blocs. The National Democratic Party (NDP) MP's focused their comments on praising President Mubarak's actions to date, and attacking Syria, Iran, Qatar, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) MP's were harshly critical of GOE actions -- or lack thereof -- to date, and repeated calls for revoking the Camp David Accords, halting gas exports to Israel, cutting diplomatic and trade relations with Israel, and opening the Rafah border crossing. The MB

also called for "Arab countries to have nuclear weapons like Israel." Independent MP Mustafa al Bakri, who has been linked to the security services in the past, has presented a draft bill to parliament, that would "freeze" the Camp David Accords. The speaker of parliament, Fathi Surour, is unlikely to allow the bill to make it to the parliamentary floor for debate.

¶10. (SBU) Salafists Declare Border Closing "Un-Islamic": According to opposition newspaper Al Dustour, four influential Egyptian Salafists joined a statement by approximately 100 Muslim scholars from throughout the Arab world criticizing the GoE,s closure of Gaza border crossings as "un-Islamic." The Egyptians include two Al Azhar University professors, the editor of the Salafist magazine Al Tawheed, and the leader of Al Sunna Al Mohamadeya, one of Egypt,s oldest and largest Salafist social service organizations. A former member of Egypt,s parliament who is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood also reportedly joined the statement.

¶11. (C) Israelis Barred from Pilgrimage Site: According to press accounts, 5 Israelis who attempted to visit the tomb of Abu Hasirah, a 19th century Jewish mystic, were prevented from doing so yesterday by local security services. Israeli Jews have regularly visited the site, located in the Nile Delta village of Damanhour, since 1979, especially in the few weeks before and after Abu Hasirah,s January 18 birthday.

¶12. (C) The pilgrimage has long been controversial. In 2001, an Alexandria court invalidated a Ministry of Culture decree recognizing the tomb as a historical site and banned the annual celebration of Abu Hasirah,s birthday. Although the Ministry of Culture appealed that decision, it was upheld in 2004 by Egypt,s Supreme Administrative Court. Despite the court rulings, the GoE has permitted the pilgrimages and celebration to proceed. The pilgrimage has been especially controversial this year, with Islamists staging at least one small protest in Cairo.

¶13. (C) The Israeli Embassy told us on January 15 that it is unaware of any Israeli Jews being turned away from the tomb. The Embassy said it contacted the Israeli organizers of the pilgrimage shortly after the Gaza operation began and suggested that they not arrange the pilgrimage this year. According to the Embassy, the organizers heeded its advice and few, if any, Israeli Jews have traveled to Egypt for the pilgrimage.

¶14. (C) The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, an NGO
CAIRO 00000081 003.4 OF 003

focused on religious freedom which has followed the issue closely, told us that it believes the account of the 5 Israeli pilgrims being barred is accurate and that the local government may have legitimate security concerns.

Humanitarian Issues

¶15. (S) On January 14, 32 Palestinian casualties entered Egypt through the Rafah Terminal for transfer to hospitals in El Arish. Egypt also delivered 270 tons of medical aid through the Rafah terminal. No aid was sent through the al-Aouja terminal. The Red Crescent donated 218 tons of the aid, and the rest was donated by Qatar, Sudan, Turkey, and Morocco. Also on January 14, an Iranian ship arrived at El Arish sea port claiming to have humanitarian aid for Gaza. Egyptian authorities denied entry to the ship and escorted the ship out to international waters.

¶16. (SBU) Possible Evacuation of Amcits: Preparations are being made for the possible evacuation of an unspecified number of American citizens and possibly other nationalities from Gaza through the Rafah border crossing, if the GoE

agrees. The Embassy is working closely with Egyptian authorities to facilitate the evacuation.

¶17. (SBU) USAID Efforts: USAID has procured medical equipment and food supplies to distribute to health care facilities in Gaza, including syringes, tubes, gloves, x-ray film, tape, silk for sutures, and bedding (mattresses, blankets, and linens) worth approximately \$80,000. All items have been distributed to the Patient's Friends Benevolent Society and the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. USAID Gaza staff report that UNRWA shelters east of Khan Younis need food, milk, blankets and mattresses. Families there receive only one meal a day.

¶18. (U) Media reports Israeli forces have shelled the UN headquarters and other civilian targets in Gaza City, including a hospital.
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